Like many other revolutions in world history, the Russian Revolution of 1917 was an event in history that truly changed the world. Old ways were rejected and new ways were implemented in their place. One of the areas in which that change was sweeping and self-consciously revolutionary was in the arena of honors and awards. The old awards of the Tsarist régime were consigned to the dustbin of history. Even the concept of honors and awards perished in the context of a new ideology that stressed equality and freedom. Recognition, when it was needed, was to be something useful: a pocket watch or a cigarette case. Military ranks, too, were abolished.

Yet it soon became evident that some new form of wearable recognition was going to be needed. In hindsight it was perhaps too much to expect that a society so accustomed to the wearing of awards would be able to so quickly reject that mode of recognizing achievement. Beginning in 1918 the individual Socialist Republics began to create their own pair of awards for recognizing military gallantry and civilian achievement: the Order of the Red Banner and the Order of the Red Banner of Labor. By 1922, when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was created through a nominal alliance of the constituent republics, the republics and their awards were to be merged into a single alliance. Yet, to separate them from the repudiated Tsarist awards these new Soviet awards (like the individual republican awards that had preceded them) rejected old design patterns. Orders were to be worn as unribboned screwback awards and medals were to be suspended from a common small rectangular red-ribbon suspender.

The next shock to the Soviet awards system came with the Great Patriotic War (World War II). Germany advanced very quickly into the Soviet Union and things went very badly. In 1942 and 1943 a set of new awards were created (mainly for successful senior military commanders) and the older awards were redesigned, with new pentagonal suspenders with ribbons (visually recalling the old Tsarist awards).

Beginning in the 1980s the Soviet system began a slow decline that culminated in the end of the USSR in 1991. While the older awards continue to be worn by surviving veterans and the erstwhile Communist Party continues to award some of them in a completely unofficial and widely denigrated fashion, a crop of new Russian awards (often consciously derived from pre-1917 Tsarist models) has taken their place.

**TITLES**

The highest awards of the USSR were the titles. In 1934, the title Hero of the Soviet Union was created for the highest levels of military and civilian achievement. While recipients of this title received the Order of Lenin, there was no distinctive badge until 1939 when a simple, distinctive, gold star badge was instituted to represent the title (the recipients of which continued to receive the Order of Lenin in addition to the title and Gold Star). This award became the characteristic Soviet award for the highest degrees of accomplishment, especially military heroism. In 1938 the title Hero of Socialist Labor was created to recognize extraordinary civilian achievement, especially successes in industrial and agricultural production. In 1940 a Gold Star (Figure 1) was created to represent this title. Recipients of this title also received the Order of Lenin. In 1944 the title Mother Heroine and an accompanying medal was created for the mothers of ten or more children, although the Order of Lenin did not accompany this title.

A number of other titles and prizes existed, including the Lenin Prize (1956), the Stalin Peace Prize (1949, renamed in 1956 as the Lenin Peace Prize), and the Stalin Prize

![Figure 1: Gold Star of a Hero of Socialist Labor.](image)
Other titles included such awards as the Medal of Honored Navigator of the USSR (1965) and Medal “Honored Machine-Builder of the USSR” (1985).

**ORDERS AND MEDALS**

The highest Soviet order was the Order of Lenin (Figure 2) created in 1930 in honor of the founder of the Soviet state, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov Lenin (1870-1924). It was originally created as a screwback award (redesigned in 1934) and in 1943, like so many Soviet awards, it was reworked into an award suspended by a ribbon (this design is shown here). It was awarded not only as an adjunct to the hero titles, discussed above, but was also awarded for high levels of achievement and, at times, for long and distinguished service. The next major order was the Order of the October Revolution (created in 1967) that was awarded for distinguished service to the State, especially “political service.” Achievement in international relations by both Soviets and foreign friends was rewarded with the Order of Friendship of Peoples (created in 1972).

The highest military order, created in 1943 at one of the lowest points of the Great Patriotic War was the Order of Victory. It was awarded to senior military commanders for the highest levels of military achievement. It was awarded to 15 Soviet leaders (including Stalin and Zhukov) and five foreigners (including Eisenhower and Montgomery). The oldest and, in some ways, most distinctive and distinguished military order was the Order of the Red Banner (Figure 3) that was created in 1924 as an amalgamation of the older separate orders of the constituent republics. It was awarded for gallantry in battle and, at times, for long and distinguished service. The variety shown here is the order as it was redesigned in 1943, shifted from a screwback award to one suspended from a ribbon. Beginning in 1942, when the war was going badly for the USSR, a set of high awards were created to recognize leadership and achievement by high- and middle-ranking officers: the Order of Suvorov (created in 1942 in three classes); the Order of Ushakov (for the Navy only, created in 1944 in two classes); the Order of Kutuzov (created in 1942 in three classes); the Order of Nakhimov (for the Navy only, created in 1944 in two classes); the Order of Bogdan Khmelnitsky (created in 1943 in three classes); and the Order of Alexander Nevsky (created in 1942 in a single class). All of these were named after important Russian military (and naval) leaders from the centuries before the revolution.

As a specific award for gallantry and distinguished service during World War II, the Order of the Patriotic War was created in two classes in 1942; Figure 4 illustrates the 1st class. While the order was not awarded after the end of the war, a special commemorative issue was made in 1985 to surviving war veterans on the 40th anniversary of the victory. Lower levels of gallantry were recognized by the Order of the Red Star (Figure 5) that was created in 1930. When it was established, this was a very high and respected gallantry award but as new awards were created at higher levels it fell in status.
In 1943 the Order of Glory was created as an intentional copy of the pre-revolutionary Cross of St. George (including using the same ribbon). Like the older award, it was awarded for combat gallantry by lower-ranking members of the military. As with the former award, it existed in three classes. The first act of gallantry received the 3rd class (Figure 6) and subsequent bravery could earn an award of the 2nd and, finally, the 1st class. For even lower acts of gallantry, the Medal for Bravery was created in 1939 (shifted to a pentagonal ribbon suspension in 1943). Similar gallantry in the Navy was rewarded with the Ushakov Medal (created in 1944). Good military service received the Medal for Combat Service (created in 1938 and moved to a pentagonal ribbon in 1943), with the similar naval award being the Nakhimov Medal (created in 1944). Distinguished military service was recognized by the Medal for Distinguished Military Service, created in 1974 in two classes.

Labor achievements below the level that warranted the title of hero were recognized by the Order of the Red Banner of Labor that was created in 1928 through a combination of the separate awards of the various Soviet republics. Redesigned in 1936 (Figure 7) it was shifted to a ribbon suspension in 1943. Lesser levels of civil achievement were rewarded with the Order of the Badge of Honor, created as a screwback award in 1935 and shifted to wear from a ribbon in 1943. The Order of Personal Courage (created in 1988) was awarded for acts of civilian gallantry and lifesaving. Patterned on the military Order of Glory, the Order of Labor Glory was established in three classes in 1974, and had the same pattern of initial appointments to the lowest class and subsequent promotions with later achievements to the higher classes. Gallant labor services were recognized.